

MERRILL DEWAN SUPERVISED A UNIQUE CREW OF RANGERS 7/23/96

I succeeded Al Graves in his position as Forest Ranger in 1958. I bought his home from his widow for \$6,500 completely furnished on a land contract.

My payment was \$50 a month at six- percent interest. As I only cleared \$90 every two weeks, the payment was like a piece of bear meat: it got bigger the longer you chewed it.

There were eight of us Rangers working for Merrill T. Dewan, the district Ranger. I was the latest as well as the youngest of the group. Most of the old timers had their way of doing things, which did not always meet Merrill's objectives or goals. Larry Liddle Sr., or L.K. as his friends knew him, was one of Merrill's favorite people. L.K. was the resident Ranger of Forestport and the Sergeant Bilko of District Eight. Merrill had to constantly call on all of his supervisory skills and powers of persuasion to get L.K. with his agenda. Since he had been doing the job long before Merrill arrived on the scene, L.K. was oblivious to his attempts at direction.

Merrill soon recognized the rapport I had with L.K. and came up with a scheme to have me help him motivate L.K. While L.K. was on an extended winter vacation, Merrill laid out a network of boundary lines in his district that he wanted me to work with him on.

Since L.K. arrived home late the night before, I did not call him, but showed up bright and early the next morning rearing to go. He was, of course, surprised to see me and still more astonished to hear of the plan. He allowed as how it was a good plan with one exception. Since he had been absent from his district for over a month, a road patrol and check for trespass was the first order of business.

I received an anticipatory call that evening from Merrill to learn what our progress had been. Needless to say, he was not happy with the results, although he grudgingly admitted L.K. was right. He would take no further chances and personally showed up at L.K.'s to join us in our pursuit of the boundary lines the following day.

We lingered over coffee and Alfreda's excellent homemade cinnamon buns and reviewed the highlights of their vacation trip until well past nine. A stop at the grocery

for cigarettes for Merrill chewed up another half-hour with PR banter with the locals. It was just short of eleven when we hit the job site.

Gathering our gear and snowshoes, we started for the woods. L.K. took about 10 steps, stumbled and gashed his knee open with his ax. We dropped L.K. off at the house around two that afternoon with five stitches so expertly applied by Doc Zott. So it went.

Merrill never really got mad at L.K. or any of the other old timers. They all had their good points that out-weighed the bad. In Merrill's view, L.K.'s deer hunting prowess and knowledge of where to find them made up for any other shortcomings.

Larry retired and Eric Mynter took his place. All went well until Eric lost Alfreda's cat. Eric may have been one of the new breed, but he was no less a character. The cat and Viking funeral stories stand as testimony to that. Then again, that's another story.